

Cherokee County Health Department



**2004
Community Health Assessment**

The Cherokee County Health Department would like to thank our Board of Health for their dedication and guidance to address the health care issues of Cherokee County.

Dr. F.L. Abernathy
Virginia Adams
Dr. Greg Cranford
Judy Edwards
Dr. Larry Holder
Ernest Jones
Porter Owen
Terry Raper
Kay Turner
Dr. Barry Watson
Bill Vespasian

The Cherokee County Health Department would like to thank our Board of Commissioners for their continued support of Public Health in Cherokee County.

Ernest Jones
Dana Jones
Barbara Vicknair

INTRODUCTION

Several agencies collaborated to make the Community Health Assessment process a success. Healthy Carolinians, Cherokee County school system, local government, non-profit agencies, Tri County Community College, and private citizens have worked together to create this document. Numerous surveys were completed by residents of Cherokee County. Some residents that did not complete a survey chose to participate in focus groups.

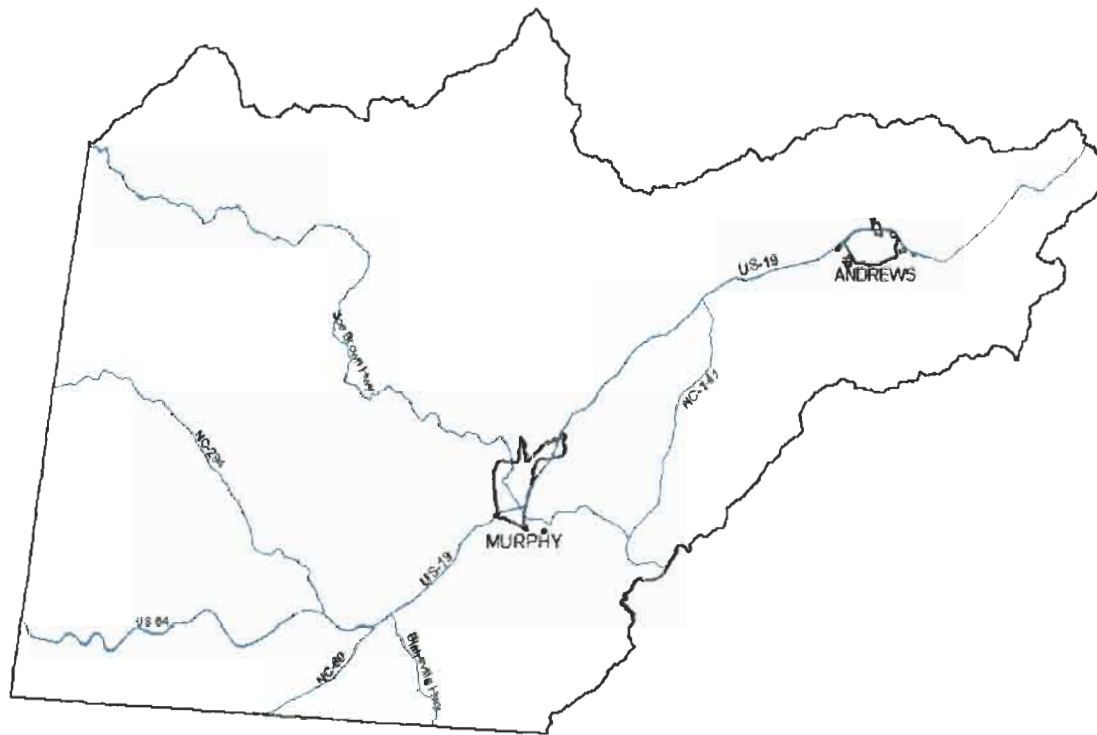
The Cherokee County Health Department has a staff of 33 employees, which are dedicated to public health and the citizens of Cherokee County. Our mission statement is, *“We assess, address and assure the health and environmental needs of the citizens of Cherokee County.”*

GEOGRAPHICS, DEMOGRAPHICS & SOCIOECONOMICS

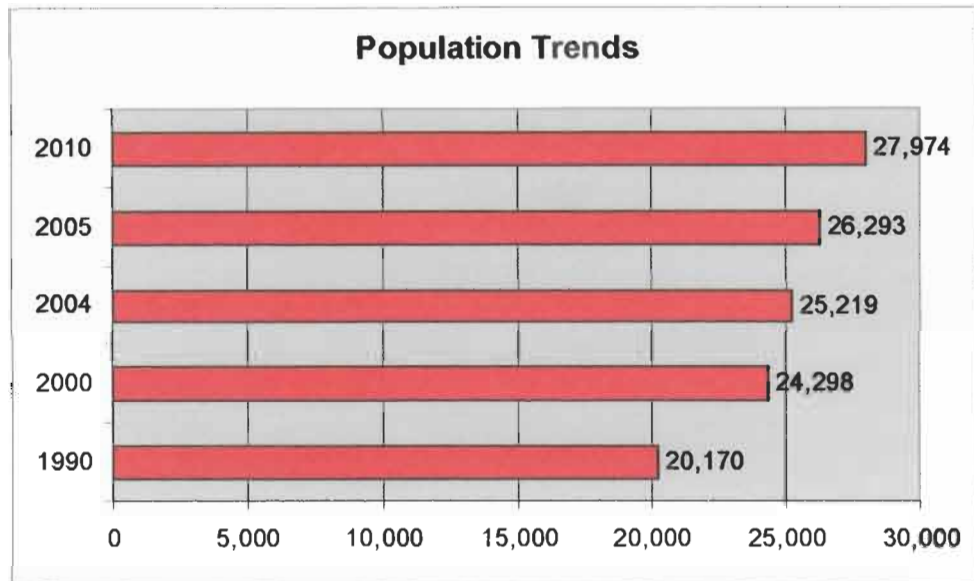
Cherokee County is situated in the southwestern tip of North Carolina. It is bound on the east by Clay and Macon Counties in North Carolina, on the south by Union and Fannin Counties in Georgia, on the north by Graham County in North Carolina and Monroe County in Tennessee and on the west by Polk County in Tennessee.

Cherokee County is comprised of two small towns, Andrews and Murphy. Our county has one hospital, one small airport and several factories. Manufacturing, tourism, and real estate are our major industries.

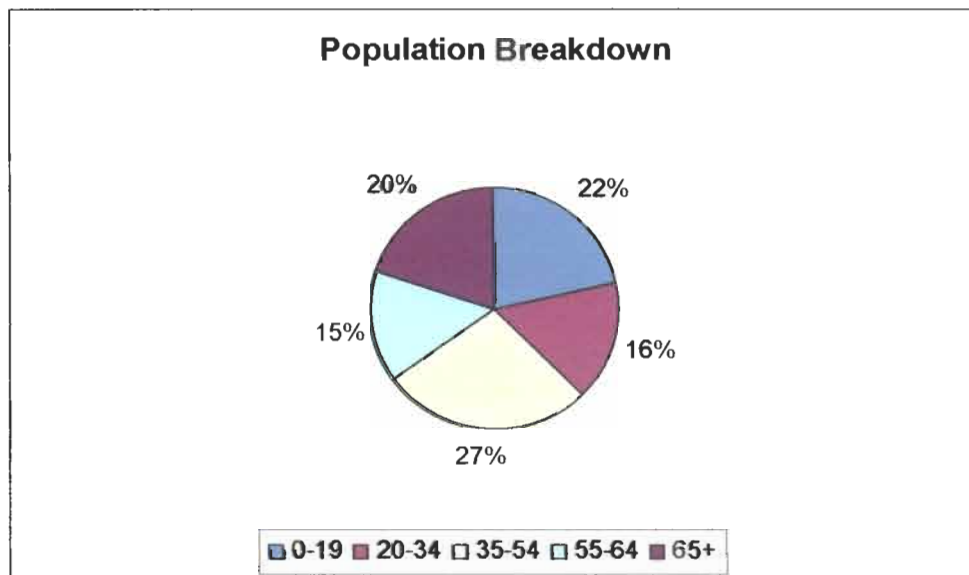
With an area of 467 square miles, our major roads consist of US 19 North and South, US 74 East and West, US 64 East and West, NC 294 East and West and NC 141 North and South. We have no railways, gas or fuel pipelines in the county.



Cherokee County is the westernmost county in North Carolina with a population of 25,219. There are approximately 10,336 households with median family incomes of \$33,768. This figure is considerably below the state average of \$46,335. Our county has a poverty rate of 20.4 which compared to the state rate of 13.0 is very high. The unemployment rate is 7.4 compared to the state rate of 3.6 which could help explain the high poverty rate. Our net migration of 2.0 is slightly higher than the state rate of 1.2.



Projected Population for 2005 and 2010



HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Early Exploration

The Southern Appalachian Mountains are believed to be among the oldest on the planet. As early as 1540 the mountains and valleys now known as Cherokee County were explored by DeSoto and inhabited by the Cherokee Indians. The great Tennessee, Hiwassee and Valley Rivers were mined for gold as evidenced by old tunnels, shafts, Spanish cannon balls, pistols bearing the Spanish coat of arms and coin molds from along their riverbanks.

Cherokee Removal

In the early 1800's as the settlers coveted the rich lands and beautiful swift rivers of Western North Carolina, President Jackson sent 7,000 troops into Western North Carolina who build six forts to oversee the removal of the Cherokee to Oklahoma. The largest of these was Fort Butler, built at the present site of Murphy on the Hiwassee River. The removal of the Cherokee along the "Trail of Tears" was described and recorded as the "greatest blot on America's history". More than 4,000 Native Americans died before they reached Oklahoma. Indians who were able to elude their captors hid in the hills and were later granted lands in Cherokee County.

Settlement

As the settlers built their forts and towns on the rivers, they farmed near the streams and creeks, and build dams to produce power to operate tub mills, grind flour and create flumes for mining gold. Logging became the first industry in the area and primary means of making a living. Logs flowed down the rivers to the sawmills; rafts, flatboats and canoes brought in supplies. As early as 1820 a Baptist mission school was established at the Old Natchez Town on the Hiwassee River and the first Methodist Church, Harshaw Chapel (a standing historic site) was built in Murphy in 1869.

Civil War

In 1861 Cherokee County raised 1,100 men for the Confederate Army as the state seceded from the union. In 1865 Kirk's Raiders burned the County Courthouse in Murphy (the first of four courthouse fires between 1865 and

1926). The present Courthouse, now over 70 years old, is constructed of solid masonry and blue marble quarried from the county. Following the Civil War, in 1888, the way of life changed for the better with the introduction of the railroad.

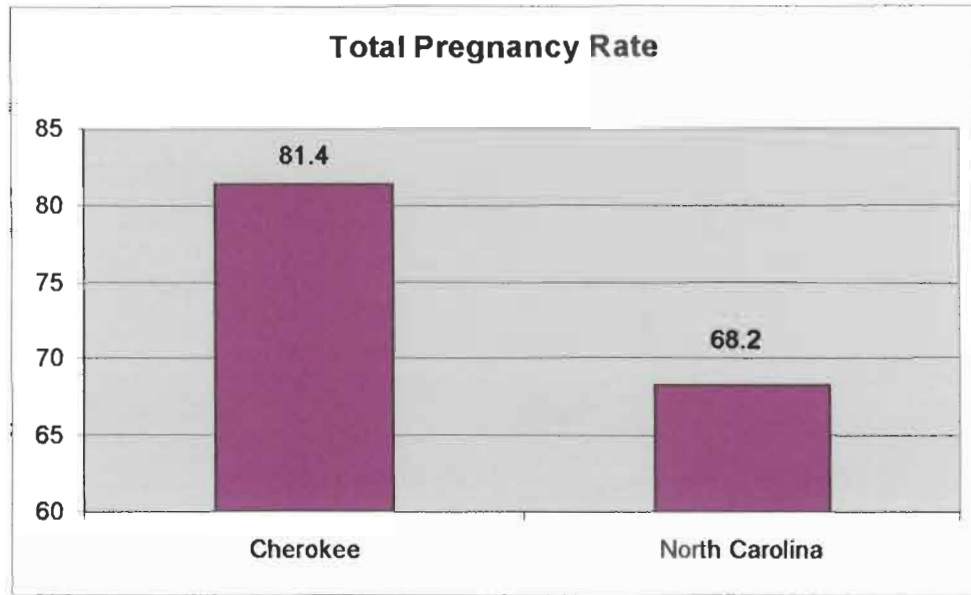
Modern History

In 1922, the first paved highway opened from Murphy to the Georgia line and Asheville to Murphy highway opened in 1926. In 1936 the Tennessee Valley Authority started construction of the Hiwassee Dam. The Hiwassee, Valley, and Nottley Rivers and their tributaries provided an abundant supply of water to the dam in 1938, one hundred years after the first families settled in this county, the whole face of these mountains changed when lights came on in nearly every home, barn and store in the county.

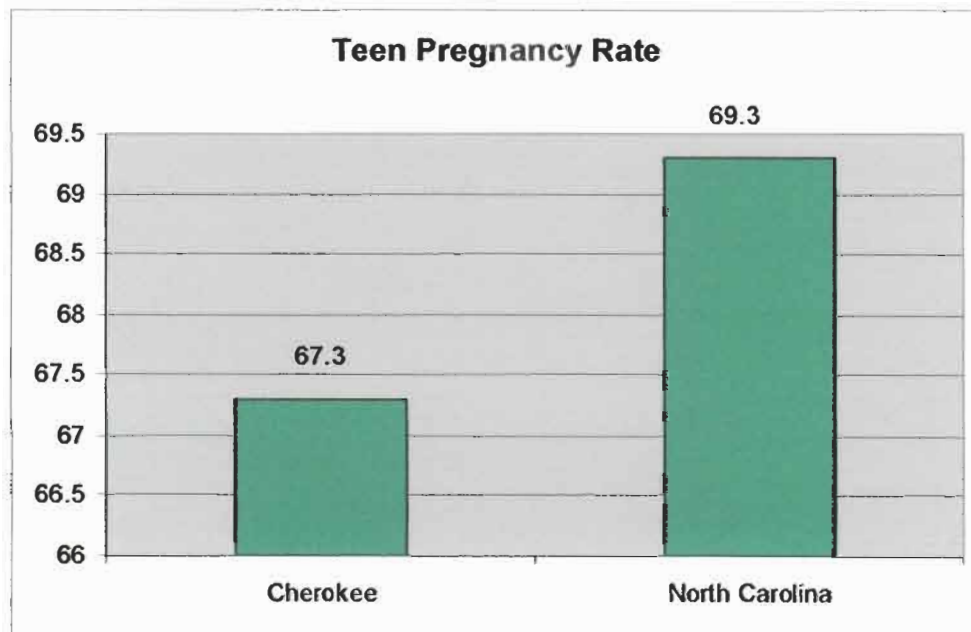
The life of the mountainfolk changed with the introduction of electricity. Progress caught up with the quiet, simple and proud, yet harsh mountain way of life. Over 3,000 people lived in the area when Cherokee County was formed in 1839. By 1860 the population had grown to over 9,000. Today's population is over 24,000, yet Cherokee County still maintains a quiet, simple and proud mountain way of life.

STATE DATA

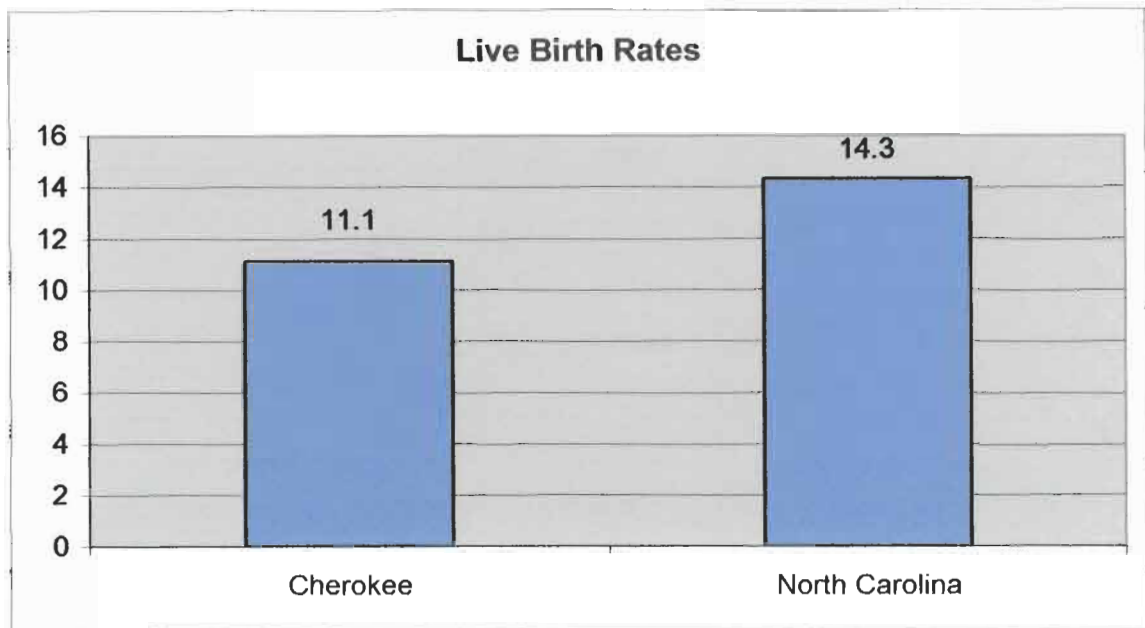
The statistics in the state data section are derived from the NC Center for Health Statistics and The Office of Healthy Carolinians and Health Education.



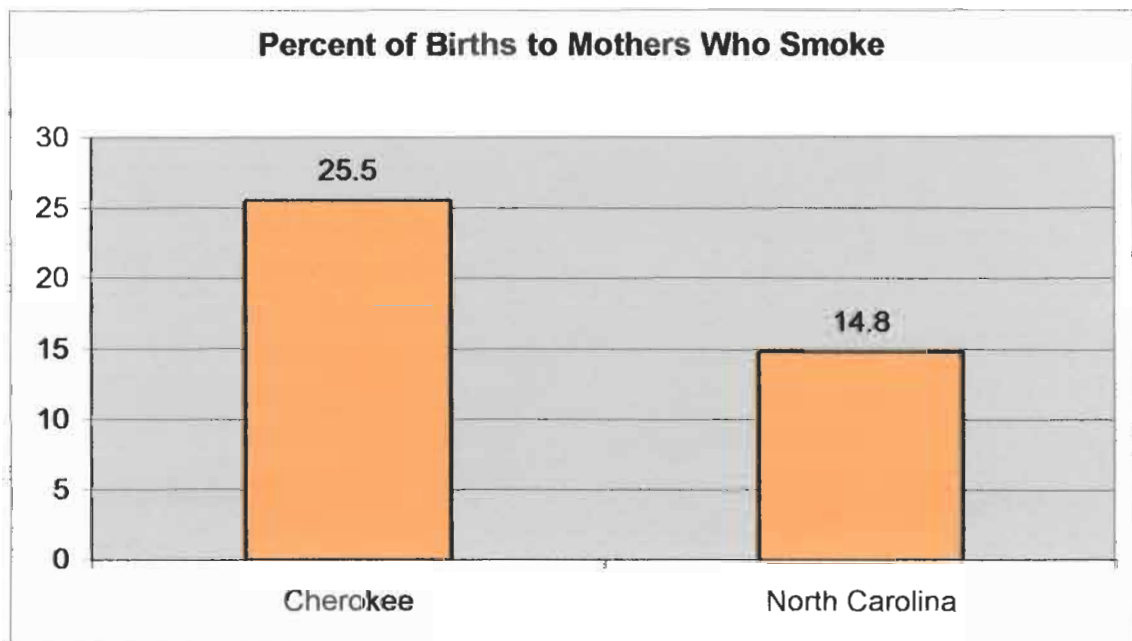
The pregnancy rates represent **all** reported pregnancies regardless of outcome. The rates are expressed per 1,000 female county residents ages 15-44.



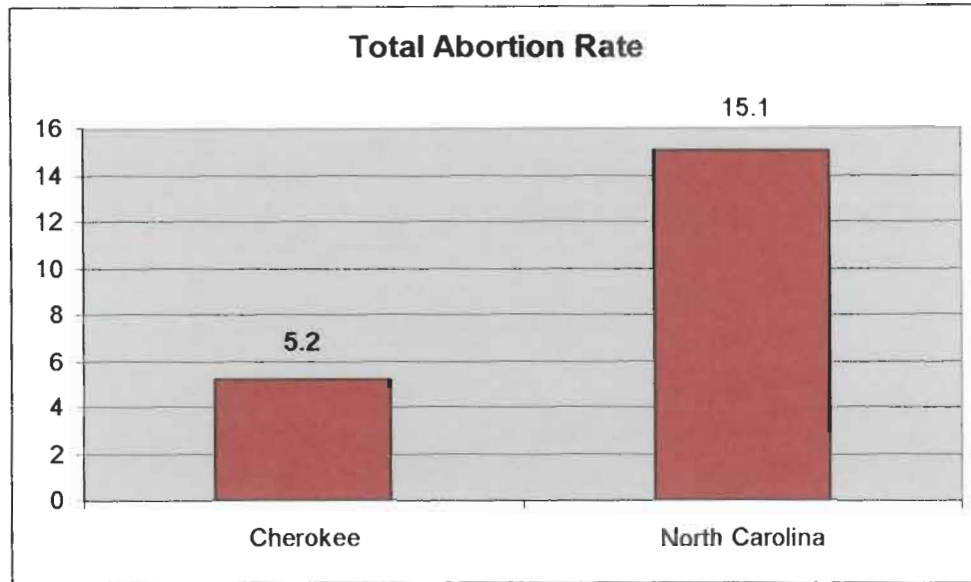
The teen pregnancy rates represent **all** reported teenage pregnancies regardless of outcome. The rates are expressed per 1,000 female county residents ages 15-19.



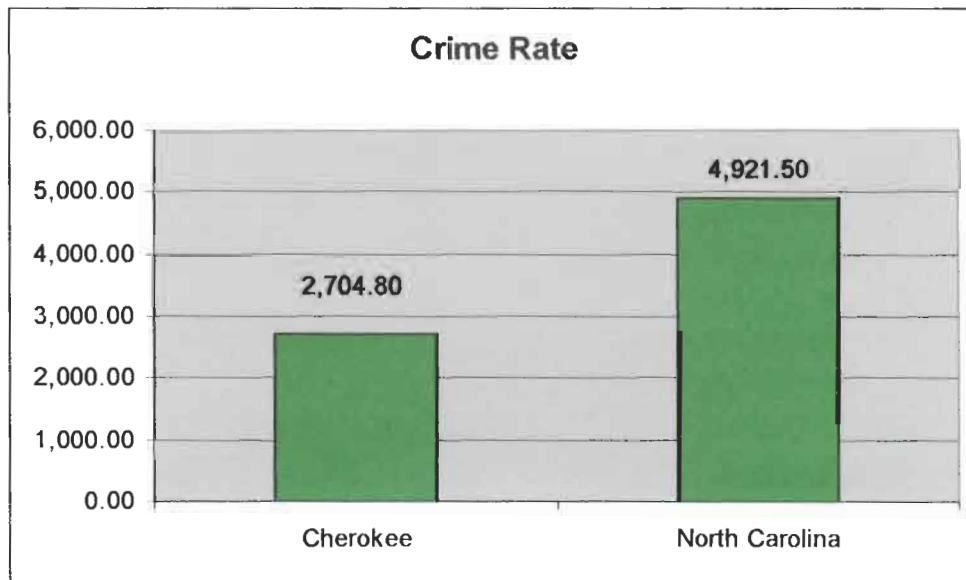
Per 1,000 Population



Per 1,000 Population

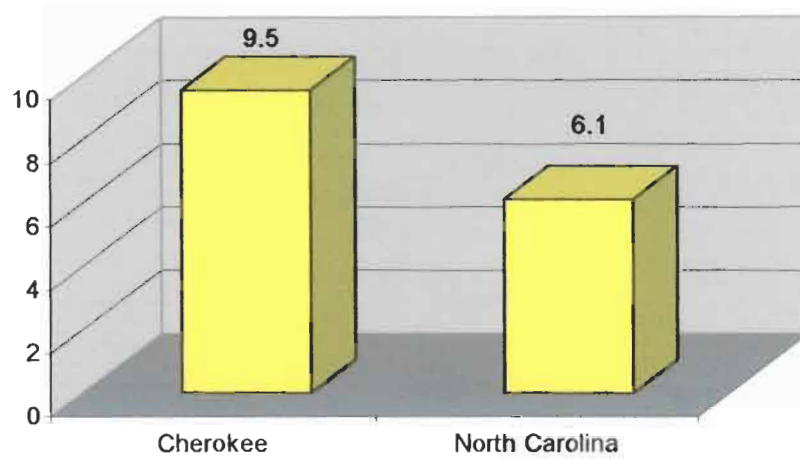


The abortion rate is reflected per 1,000 female county residents ages 15-44.



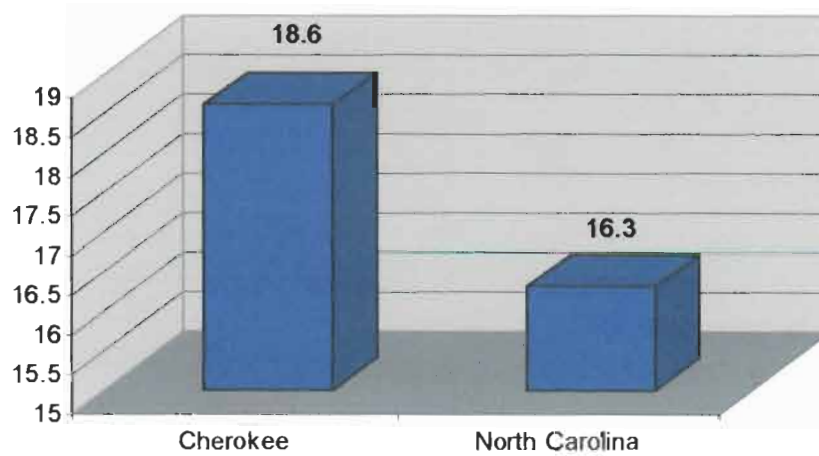
Per 100,000 population

Percent of Children in DSS Custody

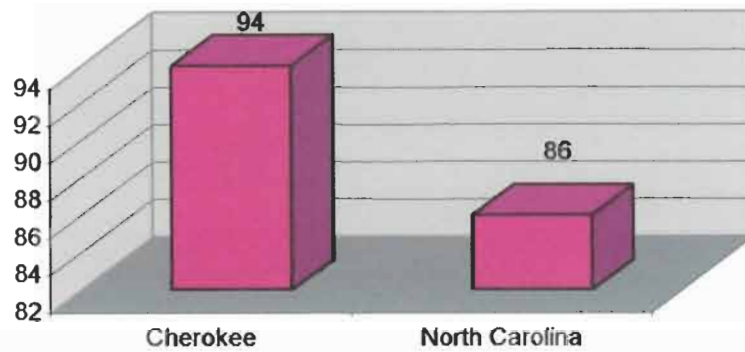


Per 1,000 Children Age 0-17

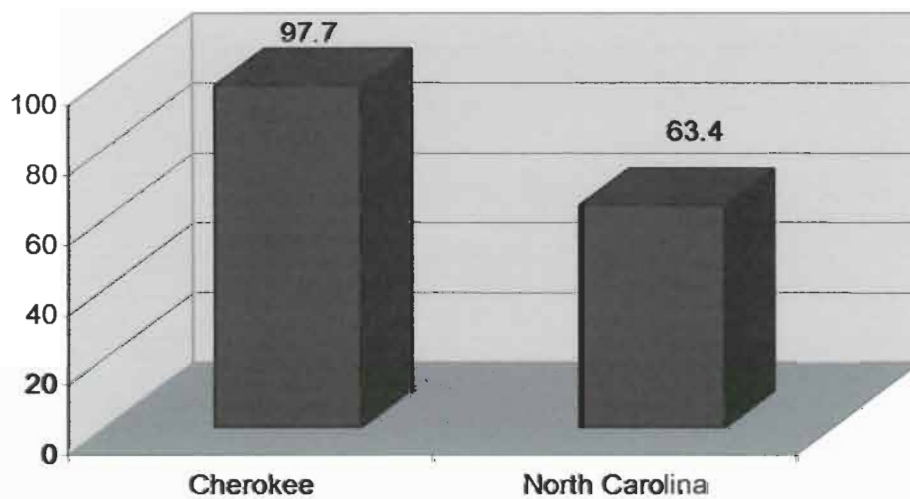
Percent of Population Without Health Insurance



Percent of Cherokee County School Kindergarten and 5th grade Children who recieved Calibrated Dental Screening.



Percent of BCCCP Goal Reached



The Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program includes female residents ages 50-62 who meet certain financial criteria.

LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH FOR CHEROKEE COUNTY RESIDENTS

Health Concern	White Males	White Females	Minority Males	Minority Females
Cancer		X		
Colorectal Cancer	X			
Prostate Cancer	X			
Diabetes	X	X		X
Pneumonia & Influenza	X		X	
Motor Vehicle Unintentional Injuries	X	X		
All Other Unintentional Injuries	X			
Suicide	X			
Chronic Liver Disease		X		

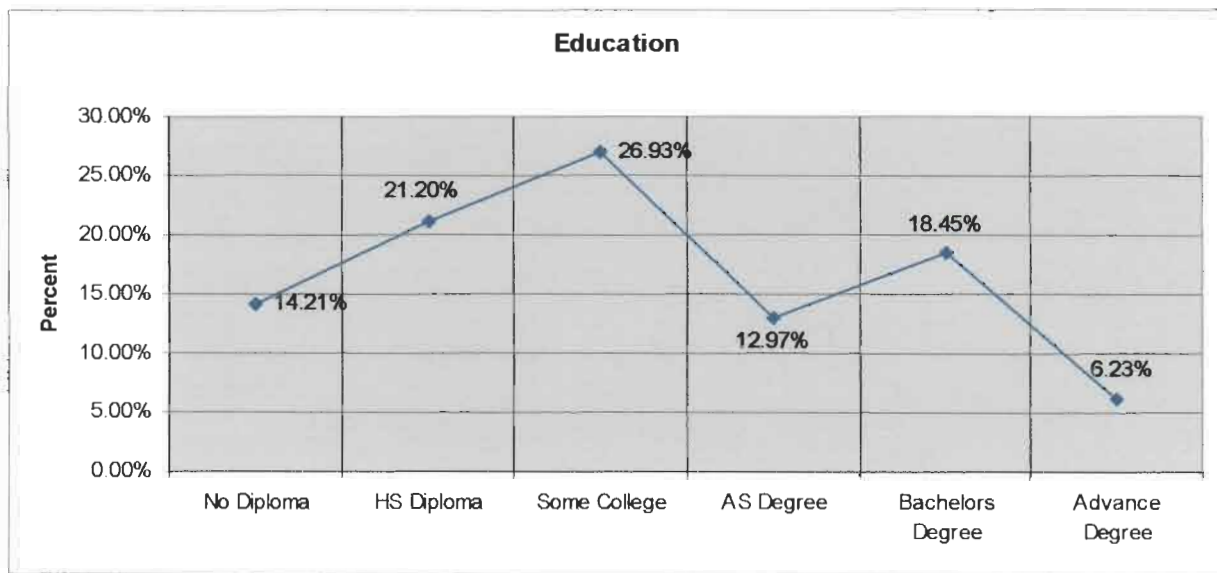
The above chart reflects the sex and gender specific death rates of Cherokee County Residents. These death rates are higher than the state average.

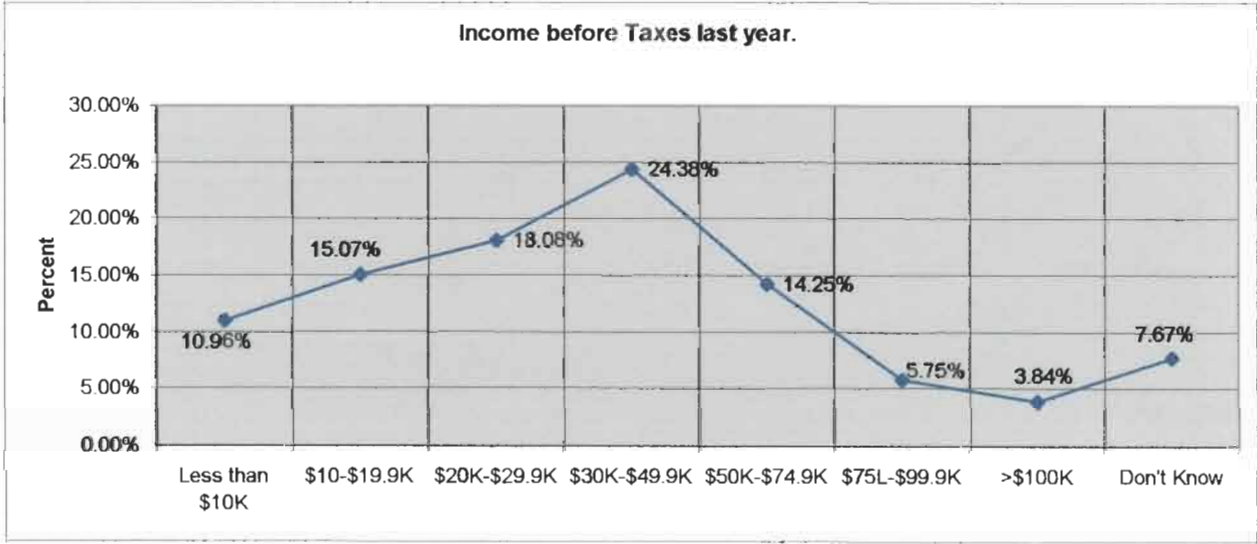
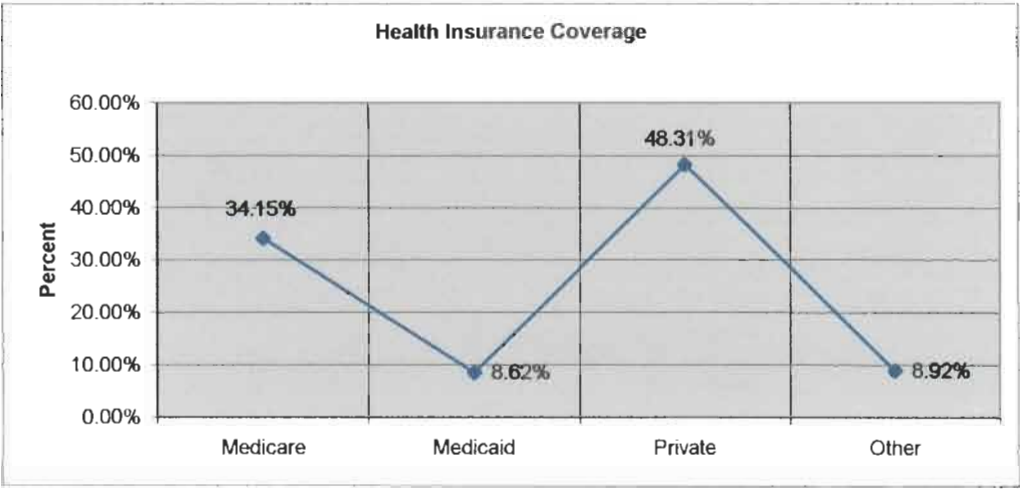
CRUDE DEATH RATES FOR CHEROKEE COUNTY RESIDENTS

Indicator	Higher than State Average
Heart Disease	X
Stroke	
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease	X
Diabetes	X
Cancer	X
Suicide	X
Homicide (Minority Males)	X
Motor Vehicle Unintentional Injuries (Age 15-24)	X
Overall Injuries	X

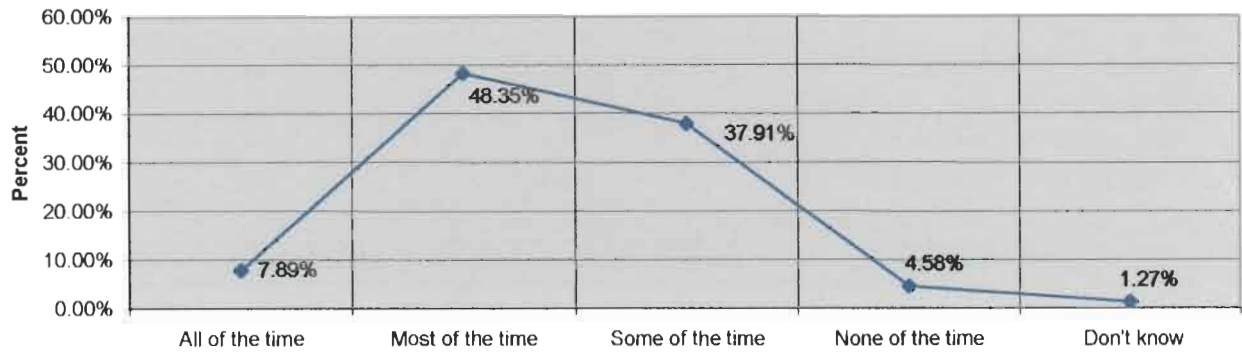
COMMUNITY HEALTH SURVEY RESULTS

A survey was drafted by a committee of community members including the Healthy Carolinians Director, the School Health Coordinator, and a Clinical Psychologist. As a result of that, 408 community health surveys were completed by residents of Cherokee County. Some residents chose to participate in focus groups instead of completing the survey. The following data reflects the community perspective.

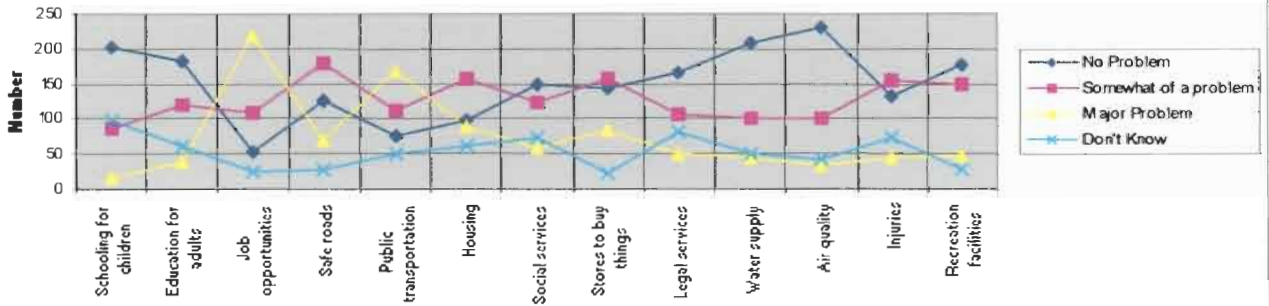




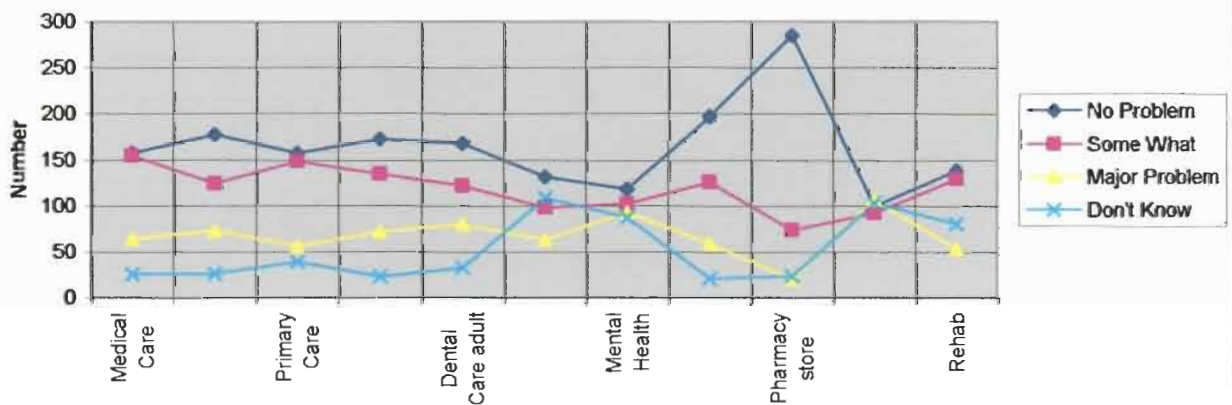
Participants feel healthy and full of energy

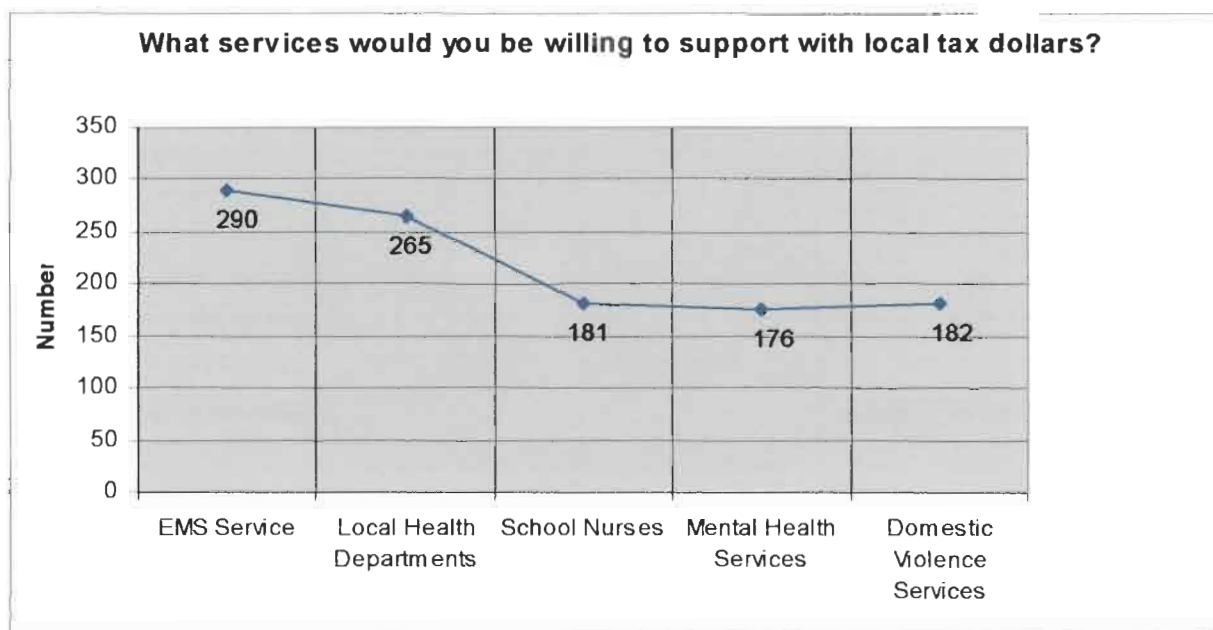
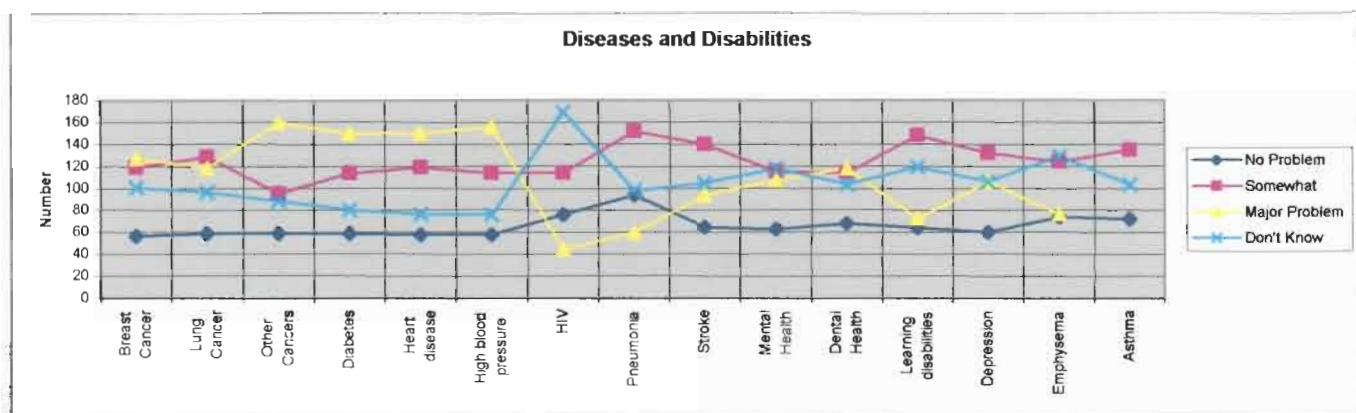
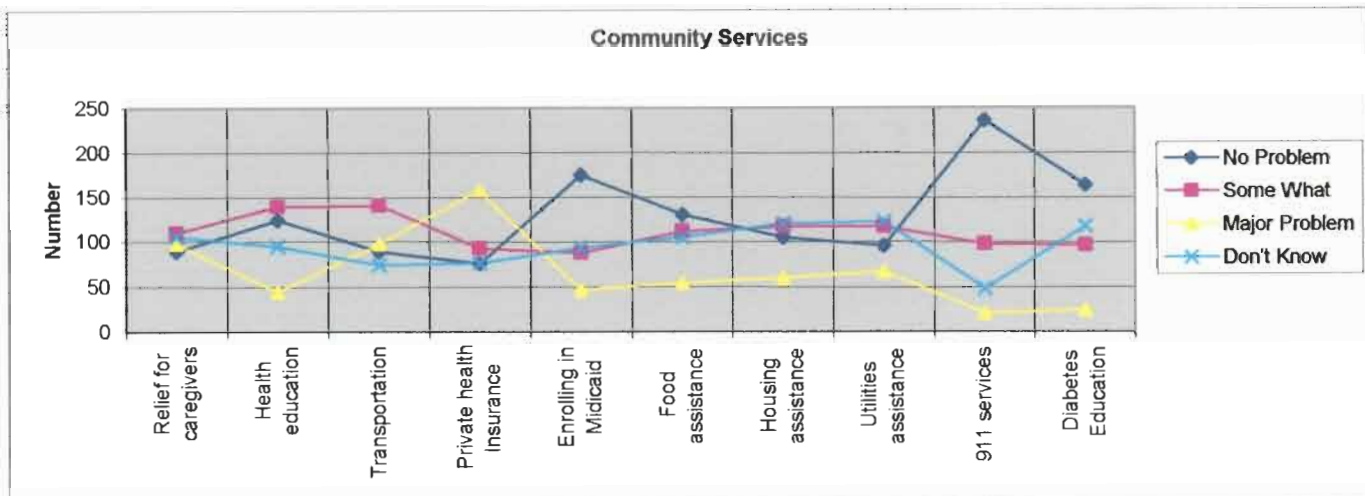


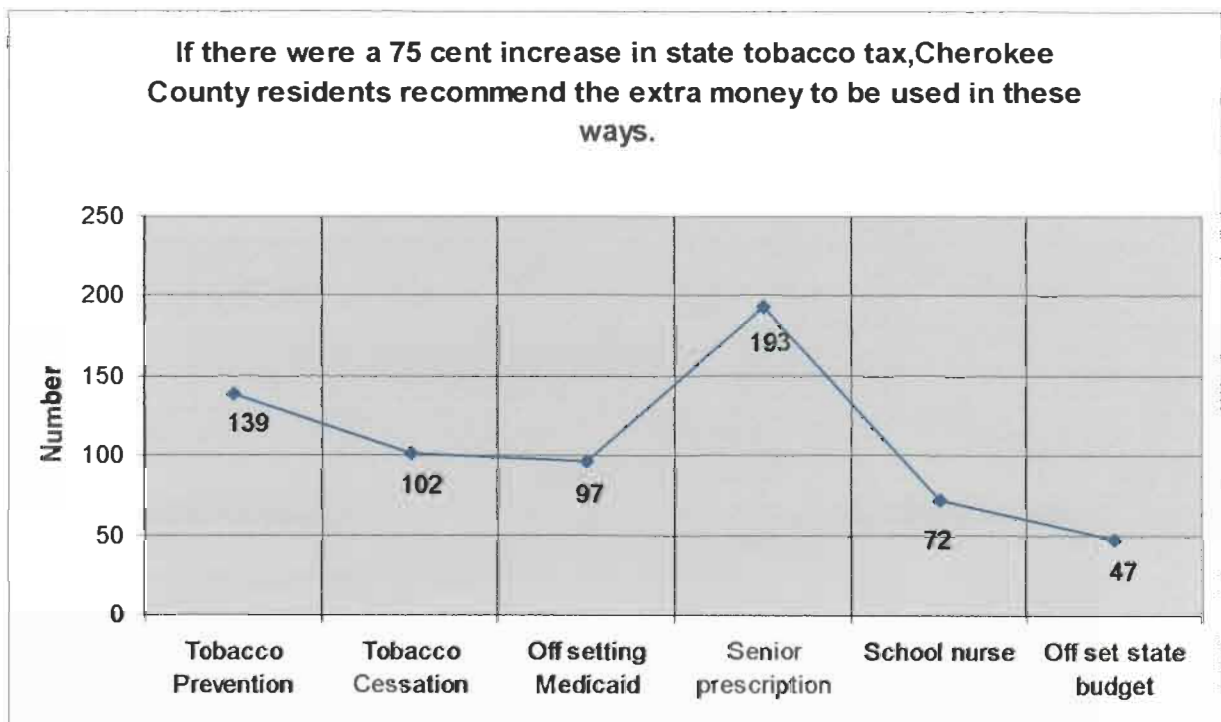
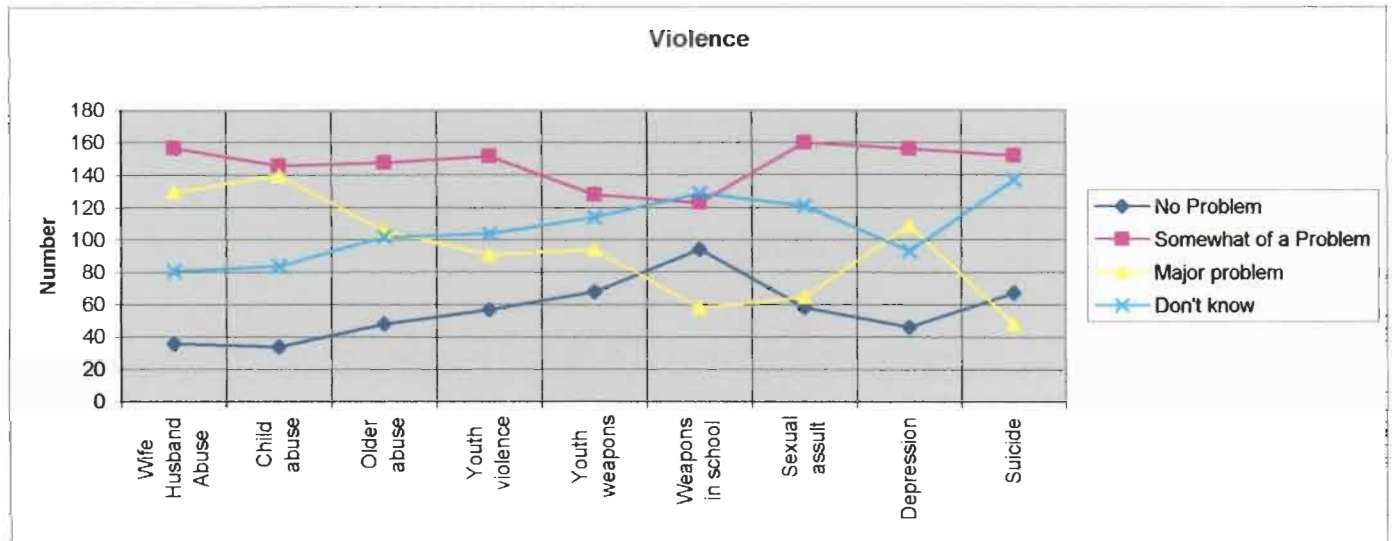
Community Issues



Medical Services







COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

The 2004 Community Health Assessment for Cherokee County revealed a variety of strengths and improvement opportunities for our citizens. Through active citizens, interagency partnerships, political leadership and determination, the daily environment and lifestyle of our community has the potential for exciting changes.

Our aging, rural community continues to see a steady increase in the number of full and part-time residents across all age groups. This presents numerous opportunities to develop programs that respond to the needs of youth, middle-age citizens, and elders. Of significance among those surveyed and the state statistical evidence is the need for improved education and opportunities related to improved diet and exercise. This also reflects a growing awareness at the national level related to overall personal wellness. Overall wellness is a strong indicator for the development of chronic disease. Among the chronic diseases of greatest concern were diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and cardiovascular issues. A variety of cancer concerns continue to emerge for our community.

Another trend consistent with national data is the local interest related to affordable health care and prescription medication. The community expressed concern for the maintenance of existing resources and the development of new resources.

The financial resources of citizens continue to be a concern. The limited number of job opportunities is an on-going issue for the community. Many of the employment opportunities are without benefits, which further reinforces the interest related to affordable healthcare.

With regard to violence and advocacy, collected data demonstrated a larger percent of Cherokee County youth in DSS custody than the state average. Also of citizen concern was the suspected level of spouse abuse and child abuse occurring in the community.

With regard to financial investment in community health services, our citizens reported EMS services, public health services, and school nursing as being their top three priorities for local appropriations.

The health and welfare issues of Cherokee County demonstrated in this document can not be solved by a single agency or group of citizens. The issues cited are complex and often fluid in a rapidly changing society. Progress with these critical community concerns will only be achieved through collaboration, improved resource allocation, and consistent follow-through of all invested parties.

ADDENDUM 1

List of Collaborators for the Community Health Assessment

Andrews Presbyterian Church
Andrews Senior Center
Andrews Seventh Day Adventist Church
Cherokee County Board of Health
Cherokee County Department of Social Services
Cherokee County Emergency Medical Services
Cherokee County School System
Cooperative Extension
Duncan's Beauty Shop
Family Resources of Cherokee County
Friendship Baptist Church
Hopewell Village Apartments
Little Brasstown Baptist Church
Moog Components
Murphy Housing Authority
Murphy Public Library
Peachtree Memorial Baptist Church
Penland Senior Center
Southwestern Health System
St. William Catholic Church
Tri County Community Health Partnership
Western Forge